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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ZAGREB 002409

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR DRL AND EUR/SCE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/14/2013

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [HR](#)

SUBJECT: ELECTIONS: OUT ON THE CAMPAIGN TRAIL

CLASSIFIED BY: POLOFF A.F.GODFREY FOR REASONS 1.5 (B,D)

SUMMARY

1. (C) THE NOVEMBER 23 DATE FOR CROATIA'S PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION HAS BEEN COMMON KNOWLEDGE FOR MONTHS, BUT THE LAUNCH OF THE "OFFICIAL" CAMPAIGN STILL SEEMS TO HAVE CAUGHT PM RACAN'S SDP FLAT-FOOTED. THE RIGHT-WING HDZ HAS A WELL-FUNDED, WELL-ORGANIZED (IF SOMEWHAT INTIMIDATING) CAMPAIGN MACHINE OPERATING AT FULL SPEED THROUGHOUT CROATIA. OUTSIDE OF THE CAPITAL AND A FEW OTHER STRONGHOLDS, HOWEVER, SDP LEADERS SEEM TO BE AT A LOSS ABOUT HOW TO GET STARTED. ALL OF CROATIA IS AWASH WITH CAMPAIGN ADVERTISING AND THE AIRWAVES ARE SATURATED WITH SLICK (AND SOME NOT SO SLICK) TV AND RADIO SPOTS. RELIABLE POLLING IS HARD TO COME BY IN CROATIA. BASED ON WHAT WE HAVE SEEN ON THE GROUND, UNLESS MOMENTUM SHIFTS, THE HDZ'S IVO SANADER SEEMS POISED TO WIN ENOUGH SEATS TO FORM A COALITION GOVERNMENT WITH LITTLE HELP FROM OTHER NATIONALIST-LEANING PARTIES. END SUMMARY.

JUST TEN DAYS TO GO!

2. (C) CROATIA'S OFFICIAL CAMPAIGN FOR PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS BEGAN ON NOVEMBER 5, WHEN THE NAMES OF LITERALLY THOUSANDS OF CANDIDATES COMPETING FOR ABOUT 160 SEATS IN THE CROATIAN PARLIAMENT WERE PUBLISHED. WITH JUST TEN DAYS LEFT BEFORE THE POLLS OPEN, ALL POLITICAL PARTIES AND INDEPENDENT CANDIDATES ARE RUNNING FLAT-OUT. ALMOST A THIRD OF CROATIA'S POPULATION IS WITHIN EASY REACH OF THE CENTER OF ZAGREB. BUT BECAUSE OF ITS ODD SHAPE AND ITS DIFFICULT TERRAIN, IT TAKES SOME EFFORT TO REACH THE REST OF CROATIA'S VOTERS. LIKE SOME OF THE CANDIDATES, EMBASSY OFFICERS HAVE BEEN TRAVELING TO CROATIA'S HINTERLANDS TO TAKE THE PULSE OF THE CAMPAIGN AS IT REACHES ITS PEAK. DESPITE THE DISTINCT DIFFERENCES IN CROATIA'S REGIONS, THE STORY SEEMS TO BE THE SAME: THE HDZ MACHINE IS IN HIGH GEAR, AND RACAN'S SDP IS ONLY JUST GETTING STARTED.

HDZ EXPRESS ROLLS IN DALMATIA

3. (C) MOMENTUM IS SQUARELY WITH HDZ PRESIDENT SANADER AS HE ROLLS THROUGH THE CROATIAN HINTERLANDS, PREPARING FOR A GRAND FINISH IN ZAGREB. CRUISING ON HIS BIG BLUE BUS FROM RALLY TO RALLY THROUGH THE HDZ STRONGHOLD OF DALMATIA, SANADER SEEMED AT THE TOP OF HIS GAME. IN A TACTIC WHICH REMINDS MOST OF OUR INTERLOCUTORS OF THE TUDJMAN AND EVEN THE TITO DAYS, ALL OF THE HDZ CAMPAIGN IS FOCUSED AROUND THE IMAGE AND NAME OF IVO SANADER AS THE "BIG MAN" WHO WILL "GET CROATIA MOVING." HDZ'S RALLIES ARE WELL-ATTENDED, WELL-ORGANIZED AND CLEARLY WELL FUNDED. ALWAYS IN ATTENDANCE, HOWEVER, ARE A LARGE NUMBER OF ROUGH-LOOKING YOUNG MEN SHOULDERING THEIR WAY INTIMIDATINGLY THROUGH THE CROWD.

HDZ PARTY DISCIPLINE

4. (C) VISITS TO HDZ HEADQUARTERS IN THE FIELD MAKE A STRONG IMPRESSION; ABUZZ WITH ENERGY, WELL-SUPPLIED WITH STACKS OF NEW CAMPAIGN MATERIALS, DISTRICT-LEVEL OFFICIALS ARE CAREFUL TO STAY ON MESSAGE. ONE CANDIDATE IN EASTERN CROATIA TOLD US THAT ALL CANDIDATES RECEIVED STRICT INSTRUCTIONS TO KEEP SPEECHES TO LESS THAN THREE MINUTES AND MAKE ONLY THOSE POINTS APPROVED BY CENTRAL HEADQUARTERS. THEY KEPT TO THESE INSTRUCTIONS; WHEN WE ASKED WHY A FEW TUDJMAN-ERA HARDLINERS WERE KEPT ON THE HDZ CANDIDATE LISTS, LOCAL-LEVEL PARTY LEADERS IN DIFFERENT CITIES USED ALMOST IDENTICAL LANGUAGE TO DEFEND THE UNEVEN PACE OF REFORM IN THE PARTY.

HDZ ATTACKS HSS -- NO POST-ELECTION COALITION AFTER ALL?

5. (C) IN PUBLIC APPEARANCES, SANADER'S SCATHING ATTACKS ON THE CURRENT GOVERNMENT HAVE EXPANDED FROM CRITICISM OF THE CORRUPT "COMMUNIST TRAITORS" (AS HE CALLS RACAN'S SDP) TO INCLUDE THE HSS. IN HIS STUMP SPEECH, SANADER NOW ACCUSES HSS PRESIDENT TOMCIC OF AGREEING TO SUPPORT THE GOVERNMENT BAILOUT OF A BANKRUPT SHIPYARD IN THE SDP STRONGHOLD OF RIJEKA IN RETURN FOR A DEAL WHICH BENEFITED A COMPANY IN WHICH HE OWNS SHARES. UNTIL RECENTLY, MANY OBSERVERS HAD

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16. (C) SANADER'S HIGH-ENERGY TACTICS CLEARLY HAVE RACAN'S SDP ON THE ROPES, BUT THE SDP RANK AND FILE BLAME RACAN, NOT

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18. (C) IN ISTRIA, IDS VICE PRESIDENT DAMIR KAJIN TOLD US THAT HIS PARTY'S LOCAL-LEVEL COALITION WITH THE SDP WILL DELIVER STRONG RESULTS IN THE 8TH DISTRICT, BUT WOULD MAKE NO PREDICTIONS ABOUT WHETHER RACAN'S COALITION WOULD SUCCEED AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL. KAJIN MADE A POINT OF TELLING US THAT IF IDS IS IN GOVERNMENT, IT WOULD VOTE TO SUPPORT A GOVERNMENT PROPOSAL TO DEPLOY CROATIAN TROOPS TO IRAQ. IF SANADER WINS, THE IDS -- AND OTHER PARTIES -- WOULD VOTE AGAINST DEPLOYMENT, WHICH MEANS AN HDZ GOVERNMENT WOULD LIKELY NOT BE ABLE TO DELIVER THE TWO-THIRDS MAJORITY NEEDED TO DEPLOY.

HSS RUNNING HARD

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110. (C) THE CENTER-LEFT HNS STILL HOPES TO DO WELL IN THE VOTING, BUT HAS SCALED BACK OPTIMISTIC PREDICTIONS OF EARLIER THIS SUMMER, WHEN IT PROJECTED IT WOULD WIN AT LEAST 15 SEATS. THE HNS APPEALS MAINLY TO YOUNGER, URBAN VOTERS; HNS OFFICIALS BEMOAN THE FACT THAT THESE ARE CROATIA'S LEAST MOTIVATED AND MOST FICKLE VOTERS; BAD WEATHER ON NOVEMBER 23 COULD KEEP HNS VOTERS INSIDE. A LOW TURNOUT WOULD HELP THE ULTRA-NATIONALIST HSP HOLD ON TO THE FOUR SEATS IT HAD IN THE LAST PARLIAMENT.

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